

# Apple Tree Creek Flood

## 15-16 March 1937

In March 1937 a cyclone was making its way around the top of Australia from the Kimberley region in Western Australia to south east Queensland. Once it arrived off Queensland, many parts of our State experienced heavy rains and flooding, most notably the Apple Tree Creek (spelt "Appletree Creek" in the newspapers of the day) area between Bundaberg and Childers.

### Rain, rain, rain

Twelve inches of rain fell in the area up to about Monday afternoon, 15 March. That afternoon at about 4pm a heavy storm dropped another deluge in a very short period. In one hour the creek rose 6 feet (1.8 metres). Between 5-6pm on the night of the fifteenth, Apple Tree Creek was in full flood.

### Hotel washed away

With the creek running behind the Apple Tree Creek Hotel, it was always going to be susceptible to a flood of this magnitude. Having been destroyed by fire four years previously the

Hotel had been rebuilt on higher blocks, which were all that remained after the floodwaters had passed through.

The Hotel, with five people inside, was picked up and torn apart by the floodwaters and deposited in various spots around Apple Tree Creek. Licensee Mr J Cronin, Mrs Cronin, Mrs Foster, her son Cecil Foster, and Henry Pearce were in the Hotel at the time. According to the *Bundaberg Daily News and Mail* on 16 March 1937 the five occupants jumped free of the Hotel only to be carried along by the floodwaters. Mr Cronin managed to grab hold of his wife and Mrs Foster but then lost his grip on Mrs Foster.

Observers on dry land noticed them floating down the creek and staged a rescue effort. Mr and Mrs Cronin were helped ashore, but Mr Cronin dived in again to go after Mrs Foster. He found her clinging to a tree and held on with her until they could both be rescued.

Cecil Foster was rescued near the site of the Hotel and Henry Pearce was found on the opposite side of the creek. All were taken to hospital suffering shock and exhaustion. Mr Cronin was hailed a hero.



## Other Damage

Also suffering at the mercy of the floodwaters were three motor vehicles, two bridges and a fruit shop. The fruit shop, owned by Mr McGibbon and tenanted by Miss Breusch, came to rest on the south-west corner of the cricket ground. It managed to get over the fence which put the floodwaters at least 4-5 feet deep. Although all the stock in the shop was damaged the building remained fairly intact.

## Aftermath

Sightseers were out in the aftermath of the flood. They would have seen:

*The Appletree Creek Hotel...torn into sections by flood...now strewn in pieces big and small, along the creek bank. Half a wall lies against a tree, while the creek banks are littered with timber, sheets of fibro-cement, beds, bedding and a bath.<sup>1</sup>*

By 8am on 16 March the water level had subsided to the level of the creek banks and by that evening the water level had dropped another 6-8 feet (1.8-2.4 metres). The "worst flood in the history of the district"<sup>2</sup> had certainly left its mark on Apple Tree Creek.

*Photos are from the Picture Bundaberg collection, and are owned by the Childers Historical Society.*

## Peta Browne

*Bundaberg Regional Library*

## References:

- <sup>1</sup> *Bundaberg Daily Times*, 17 March 1937.
  - <sup>2</sup> *Bundaberg Daily News and Mail*, 16 March 1937.  
*Bundaberg Daily News and Mail*, 16-18 March 1937.  
*Bundaberg Daily Times*, 15-18 March 1937.
- Callaghan, Jeff. *Tropical Cyclone Impacts: Australian East Coast* – <http://www.australiasevereweather.com.au/cyclones/impacts-eastcoast.pdf>

